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ABSTRACT

Using the premises that all communication efforts inside and outside the classroom setting are evaluated in some form and that teachers must use subjective judgment at least some of the time in measuring communication behavior, this report reaffirms the benefits of objective judgment and at the same time makes a case for subjective judgment as a necessary evaluation tool. The report first explains the paucity of information regarding the evaluation of communication acts that follow guidelines of the National Project on Speech Communication Competencies. It next describes the lack of evaluative instruments available to test comprehensive speaking and listening skills, and discusses how educators were forced to devise their own. Third, it examines several viewpoints stating that for various reasons communication skills assessment should be conducted by teachers in classroom situations. It then argues that teachers, because of their daily contact with students, are better qualified and able to assess a student's progress than are outside observers. The appendixes contain material taken from the "Target: Communication Skills" curriculum guide, and include a list of elements critical to program success, achievement indicators for kindergarten through grade 3, and grades 10 through grade 12, and student assessment record forms for communication skills in kindergarten through grade 3 and in grade 12. (CRH)

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IS SUBJECTIVE JUDGMENT A VALID MEANS OF ASSESSING
STUDENTS' COMMUNICATION BEHAVIOR?

by

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A paper presented at the
Central States Speech Association Convention

April 12, 1984

Chicago, Illinois, Palmer House

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CS 504 680

IS SUBJECTIVE JUDGMENT A VALID MEANS OF ASSESSING
STUDENTS' COMMUNICATION BEHAVIOR?

Assessment in the classroom has long been considered both a boon and a bane to the one evaluating. If one were but to look at the plethora of articles in journals and convention presentations dealing with assessment or evaluation in speech communication in the past few years, one would quickly surmise that the topic is one which is of concern to many in the profession. Taken from a "real-world" perspective (the world outside the classroom, that is), it is easy to state that all of our communication efforts are evaluated: by the media; by our colleagues; by our bosses; by people whom we do not have personal knowledge, but who hear our efforts at communication and sit in judgment. It is fair, therefore, to state that all communication efforts are evaluated and criticized by others. Bock and Bock (1981) go so far as to state that "No act of communication is complete until it has been evaluated and criticized by others."

In recent years we have come to deal with atomistic versus holistic evaluation and criterion-referenced versus norm-referenced evaluation in the classroom setting. The general opinion seems to be that the more clearly specified the instructions for the communication activity (speech, discussion, or other act of communication) and the more specific the evaluation criteria, the more valid the assessment of the communication acts. This paper is simply an attempt to reaffirm the benefits of objective judgment and at the same time to make a case for subjective judgment as a necessary evaluation tool. Especially when dealing with elementary and secondary students' communication behavior, the teacher-evaluator must use subjective judgment at least some of the time if the communication behavior is to be "measured" at all. In the Lincoln Public Schools,

for example, we have found that unless there is a means by which teachers may use their own judgment (based upon specific classroom achievement indicators; see Appendices for examples), there will be no opportunities presented for students to gain communication skills, much less be evaluated. In addition, there are few measures of communication competence which are practical and applicable to the classroom teacher who is not trained in communication. Even communication majors are perplexed with the task of evaluating students and determining the means by which they shall be evaluated. There is little reason to hope that the untrained will be less perplexed.

Bock and Bock (1981) offer some suggestions regarding the evaluation of classroom speaking, and, further, provide a "distillation of useful information from the published research studies on speech evaluation." When perusing this information, however, one is struck with the notion that only "speeches" are rated. There is little in textbooks and journal articles regarding the evaluation of communication acts such as those suggested by the SCA Task Force on Speech Communication Competencies, also known as the National Project on Speech Communication Competencies. Since the Guidelines for Speaking and Listening Competencies for High School Graduates were released in 1978, researchers have started to look at the competencies and how to evaluate them. The widest means of dissemination of evaluation criteria, however, is the textbook, and except for R. Rubin's work with the Communication Competency Assessment Instrument, the TARGET: COMMUNICATION SKILLS program in Lincoln, and notable State Education Departments' work in teaching and assessing the communication skills (e.g., Pennsylvania, Illinois, and Wisconsin and Massachusetts are early notable states who developed approaches), there are few books available which provide suggested criteria.

While some significant progress has been made, continued work must be pursued before oral communication assessment methods are as fully developed as the materials in the other basic skills areas. The SCA Committee on Assessment and Testing is one step in the right direction. Much of what has been done is applicable to the college/university student but is not geared to elementary or secondary students. Larson, Backlund, Redmond, and Barbour (1978) provide a detailed listing of communication competency tests to that date. Ninety tests were reviewed: Fifty-three of the ninety were for college level or adults, the remainder could be utilized for the various levels prior to college/adult ages. None of the tests, however, provides a comprehensive evaluation of speaking and listening skills. Many of the instruments were specialized assessments of social competence, personal maturity, anxiety, and the like, and not a relevant measure of a student's communication competence, per se. Dwayne Rogers of the Lincoln Public Schools Evaluation Team reviewed the tests which were noted as being applicable to the student population of the District and found that none of the tests would accomplish the goals of an assessment program for the Lincoln Schools. R. Rubin (1981) found the same kind of dilemma when she began work on an assessment of college level speaking and listening skills. Rubin was forced to do the same thing that Lincoln curriculum guide writers were forced to do: create a fourth competency context--educational, and, establish specific indicators of classroom communication competence (achievement). D. Rubin provides additional considerations when he advises that the "multidimensional" nature of complex communicative intentions and contexts may lead to difficulty in constructing adequate test items (1981).

D. Rubin also advises that performance assessment will enhance the likelihood of students learning how to communicate, whereas indirect testing leads students to learn about communication. He adds further that it is "preferable not to test when an assessment program threatens to undermine instruction." Evaluation criteria should reflect the peculiar demands of the speech/communication situation, and students should be subjected to multiple observations representing a range of situations. Both Massachusetts and Vermont Departments of Education stress that communication skills assessment is administratively feasible only if it is conducted by regular classroom teachers and incorporated into classroom instruction.

In a study of the TARGET: COMMUNICATION SKILLS program, Beall (1982) states that there is a need to determine whether or not instruction has an impact on the student, . . . and that classroom teachers must make the decisions regarding the progress of their students. "To make the assessment of speaking and listening skills as objective as possible, the TARGET: COMMUNICATION SKILLS Program was designed in such a way as to provide flexibility in the approach to instruction and ease of assessment while not jeopardizing the evaluation process." All teachers who receive in-service training for teaching the communication skills are provided with opportunities to cover the specific, written criteria for the evaluation of communication skills (See Appendices for examples of the Classroom Achievement Indicators and Assessment forms). The Classroom Achievement Indicators provide behavioral measures for each level (K-3, 4-6, 7-9, and 10-12) which allow the classroom teacher to determine whether or not students have achieved those skills. The use of the Achievement Indicators helps teachers to assess students' behaviors prior to, during, and after classroom instruction. While the criteria presented in those indicators is objective, the teacher's view of the students' behavior in the classroom context must necessarily be more subjective. Stiggins (1981) suggests, however, that the classroom teacher's

daily job is to evaluate the progress of students. Since that is so, the teacher's subjective evaluation of student progress is generally less biased than that of an outside source who is unfamiliar with the classroom context.

Daily observation of the classroom provides one with the notion that communication skills must be evaluated in a somewhat subjective manner, even when objective criteria are presented. How does one establish criteria by which we can judge those "teachable moments" when a student's revelation of knowledge is keen? How does one establish criterion-referenced assessment of the various kinds of communication activities that are presented as a means by which students can gain some practical application of the textual or lecture information presented? While it is nearly impossible to establish criteria for those kinds of situations, the classroom teacher (particularly at the elementary-secondary level) can easily tell whether or not the student has gained the necessary skills and demonstrated communication competence in those situations.

Communication is a complex process. Due to the multidimensional nature of communication, it seems unwise to say that we MUST only use criterion-referenced evaluation in our classrooms. Instead, we must judiciously create assignments and the directions to them, and evaluate as objectively as possible, but realize that subjective evaluation, too, plays an important role in the various acts of communication which we are called upon to judge. In order to be effective evaluators, we need to be fully aware of the changing standards of "appropriate" behavior in regard to communication.

The material in the Appendices is taken from sections of the TARGET: COMMUNICATION SKILLS Curriculum Guide and illustrate the specific criteria suggested to teachers for use in their evaluation of students' communication behaviors.

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APPENDICES

(Sections from the Lincoln Public Schools TARGET: COMMUNICATION SKILLS guide)

ELEMENTS CRITICAL TO PROGRAM SUCCESS

PHILOSOPHY	Communication skills of speaking, observing, listening, and nonverbal language are essential for all students. Teachers directly teach and/or model communication skills in all subject matters, not English language arts alone.
METHOD	Teachers demonstrate good communication skills, regularly review their personal achievement of the program outcomes, and actively enhance it by inservice participation or self-directed communication skills experience. They assess student proficiency and provide process instruction for students who need it.
CONTENT	Teachers directly teach the student learning outcomes through the use of the philosophy and activities from the curriculum guide. They identify for students the outcome (purpose) for all communication skills classroom activities. Students are encouraged to be partners in their own communication skill achievement through knowledge of their assessment and progress.
EVALUATION	Schools choosing to evaluate the program may use data from the Student Assessment Records, both pre- and post-assessment, or an optional form. If the district chooses to evaluate the program, it may use data from Student Assessment Records, both pre- and post-assessment, or student achievement of standardized tests of communication skills (which are not presently part of the district testing program).

ACHIEVEMENT INDICATORS

I. Communication Codes (speaking and understanding spoken English)

A. Listen effectively to spoken English.

1. Student follows directions with at least 75% accuracy.
2. Student does not continually request the same information.
3. Student carries out tasks with a high degree of proficiency.

B. Use words, pronunciation, and grammar appropriate for situation.

1. Student's language use is appropriate to the audience and situation.
2. Student uses pronunciation appropriate to the audience and situation.
3. Student uses grammar in an acceptable manner, according to the situation.
4. Student uses vocabulary which teachers and peers can readily understand.
5. Student uses language in an inoffensive manner which does not alienate teachers or peers.

C. Use nonverbal signs appropriate for the situation.

1. Student expresses feelings nonverbally.
2. Student expresses thoughts and feelings both verbally and nonverbally; both messages are consistent with each other.
3. Student uses appropriate eye contact when talking with the teacher or other students.
4. Student has facial expressions which enhance the verbal message when presenting a speech, report, or reading.

D. Use voice effectively.

1. Student realizes and uses his/her voice in a manner which is acceptable to the situation (i.e., does not "scream" answers or questions in the classroom).
2. Student uses adequate volume to be heard when asking a question or making a presentation.
3. Student uses variety in speaking (does not use same pitch, volume, or rate for every verbal response).

II. Oral Message Evaluation (using standards of appraisal to make judgments about messages or their effects)

A. Identify main ideas in messages.

1. Student identifies the task to be performed when given oral instructions.
2. Student can restate the main idea in oral messages, instructions, or questions.

(B. and C. are not focus-taught at K-3.)

D. Recognize when another does not understand one's message.

1. Student recognizes when another does not understand a message and makes adjustments in the message (i.e., clarifies, refines, restates, adapts, changes, gives examples, makes analogies, summarizes).

2. Student assesses nonverbal feedback or messages of listeners and adjusts accordingly (speaks louder, restates, clarifies, etc.).
3. Student recognizes when someone is troubled by word choices or ideas stated in one's messages.
4. Student recognizes when someone does not understand a request.
5. Student recognizes when someone is unable to follow directions she/he has given.

III. Basic Speech Communication Skills (selecting and arranging message elements)

A. Express ideas clearly and concisely.

1. Student carefully and completely explains information and observations.
2. Student fully and completely describes behaviors and events.
3. Student expresses feelings so others know how he/she feels.

(B. is not focus-taught at K-3.)

C. Organize (order) messages so others can understand them.

1. Student describes the order in which something happened.
2. Student tells the sequence of events of a story told/read in class.
3. Student explains how to get somewhere (home, the corner church, etc.) from the school, in sequential order.

D. Ask questions to obtain information.

1. Student asks questions which require more than a simple "yes" or "no" answer.
2. Student asks questions which help gain further information.
3. Student asks questions which help him/her improve school work.

E. Answer questions effectively.

1. Student answers questions which require explanation.
2. Student answers questions which require description with adequate information about behaviors or events seen/observed.

F. Give concise and accurate directions.

1. Student gives directions to his/her own home, from school.
2. Student explains to others how a game is played.
3. Student gives directions for making something (e.g., popcorn).

G. Summarize messages.

1. Student tells others the main idea of a story.
2. Student repeats, in his/her own words, instructions or directions given in class.

IV. Human Relations (building and maintaining personal relationships and resolving conflict)

(A. and B. are not focus-taught at K-3.)

C. Express feelings to others.

1. Student expresses such feelings as anger, satisfaction, dissatisfaction, joy, approval, disapproval, and personal reactions in a manner appropriate to the person(s) and situation.
2. Student tells others how/why she/he feels as she/he does.
3. Student tells others how and why she/he responds to ideas/events.

D. Perform social rituals.

1. Student introduces him/herself to others.
2. Student says "please" and "thank you" at the appropriate times.
3. Student makes "small talk" in casual social settings.

TARGET: COMMUNICATION SKILLS STUDENT ASSESSMENT RECORD
Focus-Taught Skills, Primary

Check One:
 Pre-Assessment ☐
 Post-Assessment ☐
 Ongoing Assessment ☐

School _____

Teacher _____

Date _____

Student Name

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37

I. Communication Codes

- A. Listen effectively to spoken English.
- B. Use words, pronunciation, and grammar appropriate for situation.
- C. Use nonverbal signs appropriate for situation.
- D. Use voice effectively.

II. Oral Message Evaluation

- A. Identify main ideas in messages.

III. Basic Speech Communication Skills

- A. Express ideas clearly and concisely.
- C. Organize messages so others can understand them.
- D. Ask questions to obtain information.
- E. Answer questions effectively.
- F. Give concise and accurate directions.
- G. Summarize messages.

IV. Human Relations

- C. Express feelings to others.
- D. Perform social rituals.

E/7

Key:

ONGOING ASSESSMENT

Very Good: X
 Satisfactory: /
 Needs Improvement: (no mark)

PRE- and POST-ASSESSMENT

Very Good: X
 Satisfactory: ✓
 Needs Improvement: —

Focus-Taught Skills, 3-4 IGE

Check One: ☐ Pre-Assessment ☐ Post-Assessment ☐ Ongoing Assessment

Teacher

Date _____

Student Name _____

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37
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A. Listen effectively to spoken English.

B. Use words, pronunciation, and grammar appropriate for situation.

C. Use nonverbal signs appropriate for situation.

D. Use voice effectively.

II. Oral Message Evaluation

A. Identify main ideas in messages.

III. Basic Speech Communication Skills

A. Express ideas clearly and concisely.

B. Express and defend with evidence a point of view.

C. Organize messages so others can understand them.

D. Ask questions to obtain information.

E. Answer questions effectively.

F. Give concise and accurate directions.

G. Summarize messages.

IV. Human Relations

C. Express feelings to others.

D. Perform social rituals.

F/A

ONGOING ASSESSMENT

Very Good: X

Satisfactory: /

Needs Improvement: (no mark)

PRE- and POST-ASSESSMENT

Very Good: X

Satisfactory: ✓

Needs Improvement: —

ACHIEVEMENT INDICATORS

I. Communication Codes (speaking and understanding spoken English)

A. Listen effectively to spoken English.

1. Student follows directions with at least 75% accuracy.
2. Student does not continually request the same information.
3. Student carries out tasks with a high degree of proficiency.

B. Use words, pronunciation, and grammar appropriate for situation.

1. Student's language use is vocabulary appropriate to the audience and situation.
2. Student uses pronunciation appropriate to the audience and situation.
3. Student uses grammar in an acceptable manner, according to the situation.
4. Student uses vocabulary which teachers and peers can readily understand.
5. Student uses language in an inoffensive manner which does not alienate teacher or peers.

C. Use nonverbal signs appropriate for the situation.

1. Student expresses feelings nonverbally.
2. Student expresses thoughts and feelings both verbally and nonverbally; both messages are consistent with each other.
3. Student uses appropriate eye contact when talking with the teacher or other students.
4. Student has facial expressions which enhance the verbal message when presenting a speech, report, or reading.

D. Use voice effectively.

1. Student realizes and uses his/her voice in a manner which is acceptable to the situation (i.e., does not "scream" answers or questions in the classroom).
2. Student uses adequate volume to be heard when asking a question or making a presentation.
3. Student uses variety in speaking (does not use same pitch, volume or rate for every verbal response).

II. Oral Message Evaluation (using standards of appraisal to make judgments about messages or their effects)

A. Identify the main ideas in messages.

1. Student identifies the task to be performed when given oral instructions.
2. Student identifies main ideas when taking lecture notes or listening to a broadcast.
3. Student identifies critical issues in factual and in opinionated messages.
4. Student identifies key points of messages.

B. Distinguish facts from opinions.

1. Student determines the assignment she/he is expected to complete.
2. Student tells the difference between assertions of opinion and statements of fact when questioned about the two in class.
3. Student notes that when a speaker says, "I think..." the statement is one's opinion.
4. Student recognizes that when a speaker says, "The Secretary of State, Alexander Haig, says that our intelligence reports a build-up of Soviet troops in Iran," the speaker is quoting someone who is using factual material.

C. Distinguish between informative and persuasive messages.

1. Student distinguishes between information and propaganda in commercials or political announcements.
2. Student explains the effects of various techniques used to influence listeners (music, loaded words, voice, etc.).
3. Student states the difference between content and effect of another's message.
4. Student compares his/her own standards and definitions of quality with objective standards, and explains the difference.

D. Recognize when another does not understand one's message.

1. Student recognizes when another does not understand a message and makes adjustments in the message (i.e., clarifies, refines, restates, adapts, changes, gives examples, makes analogies, summarizes).
2. Student assesses nonverbal feedback or messages of listeners and adjusts accordingly (speaks louder, restates, clarifies, etc.).
3. Student recognizes when someone is troubled by word choices or ideas stated in one's messages.
4. Student recognizes when someone does not understand a request.
5. Student recognizes when someone is unable to follow directions she/he has given.

III. Basic Speech Communication (selecting and arranging message elements)

A. Express ideas clearly and concisely.

1. Student fully and completely describes observed behaviors and events without providing too much detail.
2. Student describes/explains his/her values to others.
3. Student explains the author's manner of presenting ideas in a text or novel.

B. Express and defend with evidence a point of view.

1. Student provides adequate reasons for his/her interpretation of an author's intended message.
2. Student presents another's viewpoint and provides sufficient explanation as to how and why she/he agrees/disagrees with that view.
3. Student defends his/her reasons for needing to go to the media center to obtain additional information for an assignment.

C. Organize (order) messages so others can understand them.

1. Student carefully and completely explains information to others in such a way that they understand what she/he meant when presenting it.
2. Student carefully explains what she/he observed as other members of the class were involved in group projects or problem-solving simulations.
3. Student utilizes various organizational techniques for presenting information for an assignment/oral report.

D. Ask questions effectively.

1. Student asks questions which allow him/her to gain additional information about the development of an idea.
2. Student knows when and how to ask questions which require more than "yes" or "no" answers.
3. Student asks questions which obtain suggestions for his/her classroom improvement.

E. Answer questions effectively.

1. Student answers questions which require explanation and development with adequate information.
2. Student answers questions which require description with adequate information about behaviors and events observed.
3. Student answers questions with all necessary information; this implies that the student is able to differentiate between questions requiring "yes" or "no" answers and those requiring elaboration.

F. Give concise and accurate directions.

1. Student explains an experiment or procedure to others.
2. Student fully describes a game or activity to others so that they can play the game or carry out the activity.
3. Student explains the steps involved in computing a math/science problem to the rest of the class.

G. Summarize messages.

1. Student summarizes a movie viewed in class.
2. Student summarizes a short story or poem so that she/he explains the content in a few sentences.
3. Student summarizes a meeting which she/he attended.

IV. Human Relations (building and maintaining personal relationships and resolving conflict)

A. Describe another's viewpoint.

1. Student describes how another person felt as a member of a group discussion.
2. Student describes the various views concerning a controversial subject.
3. After interviewing another person, the student explains that person's values.

B. Describe differences in opinion.

1. Student describes the differences in opinions of two movie reviewers who seem to contradict each other.
2. When studying history or specific novels or plays, student describes the opposing views of major characters.
3. Student describes the points over which she/he and a partner disagree about a problem to be solved.

C. Express feelings to others.

1. Student describes the feelings of a character in a story, novel, or play and explains whether or not she/he has had similar feelings and why.
2. Student expresses how she/he feels when receiving compliments or put-downs and why.
3. Student expresses what kinds of things cause feelings of anger, sadness, happiness, frustration, etc., and why.

D. Perform social rituals.

1. Student yields to others who also wish to become involved in a discussion (turn-taking).
2. Student introduces people to each other.
3. Student demonstrates the appropriate social amenities in various classroom situations.

TARGET: COMMUNICATION SKILLS STUDENT ASSESSMENT RECORD

Focus-Taught Skills, Senior High

Check One:
Pre-Assessment
Post-Assessment
Ongoing Assessment

☐
☐
☐

School

Teacher

Date

Student Name

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37
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B. Describe differences in opinion.																																					
C. Express feelings to others.																																					
D. Perform social rituals.																																					

Key:

ONGOING ASSESSMENT
Very Good: 3g
Satisfactory: 2g
Needs Improvement: (no mark)

PRE- and POST-ASSESSMENT
Very Good: 3g
Satisfactory: 2g
Needs Improvement: —